

NEW EDITION



HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF
LESOTHO

SCOTT ROSENBERG
RICHARD F. WEISFELDER
MICHELLE FRISBIE-FULTON

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Scott Rosenberg
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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of apartheid, international attention has moved away from Lesotho and to its larger neighbor. This is not only true for aid agencies, but is also reflected in the scholarly work being done. Although there is still excellent scholarship being produced about Lesotho, it is significantly less than what was generated during the heyday of the antiapartheid struggle from the mid-1970s through the 1980s.

The two best-known pieces of historical scholarship were both produced in 1975 and focused on the Basotho chief, Moshoeshe. Peter Sanders's *Moshoeshe: Chief of the Sotho* and Leonard Thompson's *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshe of Lesotho 1786-1870* provide two different perspectives on the life and times of Moshoeshe. Although they are both exceptional pieces of scholarship, each has shortcomings that the other addressed. The emphasis placed on Moshoeshe reflects the general scholastic trend of the postindependence period that focused on the great men of African history. Over the last 20 years, the historical scholarship has moved from focusing on Moshoeshe to examining the lives of commoners. Robert Edgar's *Prophets with Honour* initiated this trend with his presentation of the history of the commoners' association known as *Lekhotla la Bafo*. Seeking to bridge the gap between the studies of Moshoeshe and commoners, Scott Rosenberg's work has examined the role of Moshoeshe in the national identity of the Basotho. The most complete history of Lesotho is a more general work produced by Stephen Gill. Gill's *A Short History of Lesotho* is an excellent introduction for a novice, but also contains information useful to scholars.

During the 1980s, there was a significant amount of research done on the impact of migrant labor and Lesotho's economic dependence on South Africa. Two of the most significant works are Bardhill and Cobbe's *Lesotho: Dilemmas of Dependence in Southern Africa* and Colin Murray's *Families Divided*. Following these works, Bonner, Guy, Kimble, Moloka, and Thabane have all examined aspects of the migrant experience. They have focused on its cultural impact as well as the role of women in the migrant system. However, David Coplan has most deeply examined the cultural impact of migrant labor as well as the meaning of Sesotho identity today. Elizabeth Eldredge and Marc Epprecht have both made important contributions by highlighting the role of women in Basotho history.

A significant portion of Lesotho's political history since independence has been chronicled by Richard Weisfelder. Others, such as Roger Southall, have made major contributions toward evaluating electoral outcomes and partisan conflicts. Khaketla's *Lesotho 1970*, Machobane's constitutional history and study of military rule, and Leeman's chronicle of the Basutoland Congress Party have explained important issues from the perspective of insiders. A cluster of academics from the National University of Lesotho, including Mahao, Matlosa, Mothibe, Pule, Santho, Sejanamane, and Sekatle, have contributed frequent articles on Lesotho's political trajectory.

There is a wide range of primary and secondary sources that chronicle the precolonial and colonial periods. The earliest written accounts about the Basotho were produced by French missionaries Eugene Casalis and Thomas Arbousset. Produced in the first half of the 19th century, their works provide excellent physical description of the land as well as the culture of the Basotho. Ellenberger's *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* was the first comprehensive written history of the Basotho. This work provides valuable details about the origins of many clans that comprise the Basotho nation. It also contains accounts of political events and numerous customs. Missionaries such as Laydevant and Jacottet wrote extensively on Basotho culture during the early 20th century.

One of the most important collections from the mid-19th century is George Theal's *Basutoland Records*, which covers the 10 years preceding and following the British annexation of Lesotho. The first three volumes have been available since their publication in 1883, yet volumes

4–6, which had previously only been available at a few select archives, are now in print. There are numerous works about the Basotho that were produced during the colonial period by European officials and visitors. Some of these are more scholarly endeavors whereas others contain rudimentary observation. These works vary from James Walton's pieces on various important places in Lesotho to Hugh Ashton's *The Basuto: A Social Study of Traditional and Modern Lesotho*. Ashton also produced other works on Basotho culture. One of the most important works produced during the late colonial period is Robert Germond's *Chronicles of Basutoland*. This book reproduces many important primary accounts produced by French missionaries from the precolonial period until the end of the 19th century.

Two excellent autobiographies of Basotho have been published. Stimela Jingo's *A Chief Is a Chief by the People: The Autobiography of Stimela Jingo* provides insight into life during the colonial period, especially in the chief's court. Mpho 'M'atsepo Nthunya's autobiography, *Sing Away the Hunger*, not only exposes the struggle of many Basotho women, but also provides excellent detail regarding many Basotho religious and cultural practices.

There are two excellent archives in Lesotho, one in the basement of the library at the National University of Lesotho, and the other at the Morija Museum and Archive. The holdings at the National University cover a broad range of material. Much scholarly work on Lesotho, including published as well as unpublished theses, can be located there. The archive has several special collections containing a nearly complete set of the Basutoland Annual Colonial Reports and numerous newspapers dating back to the early 20th century. The Morija archive contains a wide range of primary and secondary sources. Most of the primary material generated by the Paris Evangelical Mission Society can be found here. Numerous colonial documents are also available, including the Proceedings of the Basutoland National Council and the Basutoland Annual Colonial Reports. The archive houses most of the Basotho newspapers, and even has a few early editions of the newspaper *Naledi*. There are also selected government documents. Lastly, there are numerous secondary works including several unpublished theses. Sadly, most of the primary documents from the colonial administration as well as many generated by the Lesotho government are no longer available. The National Archive had been housed for decades in the basement of

the library at the National University of Lesotho. However, for an unknown reason, in the mid-1990s, the contents of the National Archive were packed up and delivered to an abandoned location in Maseru. The items stored there are not available to scholars at this time. This will make the future of scholarship in Lesotho more tenuous, as many of the primary documents are of vital importance to the continuing study of Lesotho.

Today, the best way to keep up with events in Lesotho is to follow one of several newspapers that are generated on a regular basis. Although they are kept by local archives, readers overseas can find some of them in libraries in the United States and online. Perhaps the two best sources of information about Lesotho currently are Sechaba Consultants in Maseru and David Ambrose at the National University. Sechaba Consultants has produced a wide range of materials; for example, *Lesotho's Long Journey* provides an overview of Basotho history, culture, politics, economics, education, and health. It traces many of these from the past right up to the present. Other works by Sechaba have focused on different aspects of migrant labor. David Ambrose has written on a wide range of topics, from *Maseru: An Illustrated History* to guidebooks about local birds. The National University of Lesotho and the Institute of Southern African Studies both produce a number of scholarly journals that focus on Lesotho, although these are not readily available outside of Lesotho.

GENERAL

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